

---

---

# TRAVELIN' ROUND AT CAFÉ MADDALENA: CHEF BRETT LAMOTT

BY CANDACE BYRNE

A kilometer or two off I-5, at the bottom of a steep hill leading to the old Dunsmuir train station, Chef Brett LaMott at Café Maddalena is no stranger to residents of the north state. Chef LaMott took ownership of Café Maddalena five years ago, and he has gradually shifted Café Maddalena from its emphasis on Italian food. Now, diners enjoy food influenced by cooking traditions in five Mediterranean countries: Spain, Italy, south of France, Morocco, and Algeria.

"It's fun," says LaMott, "never boring. We take each main ingredient"—recent entrees featured eggplant and artichokes, sea bass, black cod, scallops, chicken, pork medallions, lamb shanks, and beef tenderloin—"and I ask, 'What do they do with it in one of these countries? What do they *really* do?' Then we build our menu items around that."

## THE MEDITERRANEAN

LaMott explains how, around the Mediterranean, food doesn't change much kilometer by kilometer, but travel 100 kilometers, and foods are distinctively different, influenced by local availability and taste. He uses ratatouille, the French eggplant created from plentiful summer vegetables, as one example. In France, ratatouille is a baked dish, with plenty of *aubergine*, *courgettes*, onion, garlic, tomato, and breadcrumbs. The Italians add oregano and pine nuts. Tunisians will use pine nuts and garlic to the max and also throw in currants, with their signature sweetness. In Spain, orange zest mingles with the pine nuts and lots of oregano. Moroccans, just as committed to orange zest, use mint instead of oregano.

Desserts too change as kilometers pass. LaMott uses apricots as an example. In Spain, dried apricot leather is rolled in flour and fried. The French are likely to make an almond tart, apricots surrounded by *frangipane* in an almond flour crust. (See sidebar for an Almond Tart recipe that, according to LaMott, every cook loves to have in the recipe box.) Italians are more likely to offer the fruit fresh or stewed very briefly in simple syrup, accompanied by a hazelnut cookie made of semolina flour. The African nations use couscous for both savory and sweet dishes; apricots, fresh or dried, star in the sweet.

This sort of attention to authentic methods, spices, and ingredients characterizes LaMott's cooking and, as he makes his decision on which country to feature in which entree, provides the variety on the Café Maddalena menu.



## SPAIN'S EXTREMADURA

During the two winter months when Café Maddalena is closed, Brett and his wife Nancy habitually travel to the Extremadura region of Spain to visit their friend Emiliano. There, they help the 84-year old harvest his pigs, lambs, and goats and make chorizo, cure ham, and fashion goat cheese. Says LaMott, "It's important to get my hands dirty, to remind myself where food comes from."

## LOCAL TRIPS

Food served at Café Maddalena probably hasn't come far, since LaMott uses local sources for fresh, seasonal ingredients whenever possible. Sumner Ranch eggs, from Eric Sumner; chickens and rabbits from the Grenada 4H-ers in Siskiyou County; vegetables and livestock from growers he's identified by their county fair entries; apricots, peaches, plums, apples, pears from Liz Zaharris's farm in Churn Creek bottom; beef from Prather Ranch; porcini and grey morel mushrooms picked from Mt. Shasta and sourced from Franco Vassallo of PanExotic Wild Edibles in McCloud are just a few local examples. Recently, a lavender cheesecake on the dessert menu used culinary lavender from Mt. Shasta Lavender Farms. The fish is sourced through Pacific Seafood or Ocean Beauty from fishers of the Pacific Northwest ocean waters and waters along the coast of California. LaMott says he doesn't think consumers should buy fish from supermarkets, since neither the age of the fish nor its source can be reliably known. Working with these two companies, LaMott is assured the freshest fish from identified sources.

## THE HOME KITCHEN

At home, LaMott has on hand dried pastas, anchovies, capers, olives, piquillo peppers, garlic, onion, shallots, truffle oil, and frozen truffles. He likes champagne vinegar and an earthy, Spanish olive oil. He always has *parmigiano-reggiano*, the only parmigiano as far as he's concerned, and he likes other cheeses as well, goat cheese and Rogue River Blue from

Rogue Creamery in southern Oregon. A meal after a night cooking at the restaurant is likely just pasta with oil and anchovies or oil and truffles, topped with *parmigiano-reggiano*, and a quick salad.

In both home and restaurant kitchens, a necessity is saffron. "I don't do anything without it," says LaMott. "Three to four threads lend brightness to any dish." At home he's fond of making a Spanish tortilla, the baked dish of potato and egg, brightened with a few strands of saffron.

Another favorite, late-night dish after the restaurant closes: he takes one of those Extremaduran dried chorizos, shaves off a few pieces. He fries some thick slices of potato in olive oil and sets them on a plate. He then renders the chorizo in the same pan and sets it atop the potatoes. Finally, he fries an egg in that pan, hot and quick, until the white is crisp and the yolk runny, and tops the potato and chorizo with the fried egg. It's a common meal in the Spanish countryside, local ingredients, simply prepared.

## JUST A FEW STEPS

The "Keep It Simple" credo characterizes LaMott's home kitchen as well as Café Maddalena. LaMott avers, "With fresh ingredients, you don't need to do much." Café Maddalena's kitchen in view, diners can watch Chef LaMott. For the sautéed prawns with garlic on the appetizer menu, he sprinkles threads of saffron and flakes of red pepper on the prawns, adds plenty of garlic, heats that earthy Spanish olive oil to smoking, slides the shrimp, saffron, pepper flakes and garlic into the pan, splashes in some white wine, tosses the pan, and in about ninety seconds the prawns are served just so, perfectly cooked and flavored, and only a few steps to table. 🍴

*Brett and Nancy LaMott's Café Maddalena is located at 5801 Sacramento Ave. in Dunsmuir, right across from the Amtrak station. Dinner is served Thursdays through Sundays from 5 pm to 10 pm. Menus can be previewed at [www.cafemaddalena.com/files/menu.htm](http://www.cafemaddalena.com/files/menu.htm) and reservations made at 530.235.2725.*

### ALMOND TART

*Chef LaMott testifies that people love having this recipe in their recipe box. Depending on the season, substitute prune plums, pears, or peaches. If using peaches, use 1 ½ – 1 ¾ lbs. only, because of their abundant juice.*

#### Dough

- ⅔ cup butter
- Pinch of salt
- 1 ½ cup flour
- Pinch baking powder
- 3 tablespoons almond meal (finely ground almonds)
- 1 ½ eggs
- ¾ cup sugar

Mix by hand or in blender or Cuisinart. Chill. Roll out dough and place into a 10" tart pan. Add apricots, halved and pitted, to fill pan.

#### Filling

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup almond flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons flour

Mix together and fill piping bag. Pipe filling into tart pan around apricots. (Absent piping tools, put filling on dough in tart pan before adding apricots.)

Bake at 375 degrees 30-45 minutes.

